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ABSTRACT

It is essential for all students to become life long information users in order to become quality citizens in today's information world. In this paper, a school library media specialist illustrates how she and other school district librarians planned and implemented a redesign of the school library facility and a change in the library program. The school librarians discussed issues, conducted research, and attended workshops, conferences, and meetings all concerned with planning and promoting a program. The design group collaboratively designed a workable, flexible program meeting the needs of the school. The development process at the library at Bellevue Elementary School (Syracuse, New York) began with assuring that resources and services will always be accessible to all patrons. One way to guarantee access is by providing technology such as circulation and online catalog systems. Next, the new library program was presented to the staff. In the new library program, teachers and the school library media specialist planned research projects, booktalks, story time, and thematic units together. The most difficult part of any library program is evaluation because achievement of certain skills is not immediate. The program must now be monitored on an ongoing basis to assure continuous improvement in order to provide the best service for patrons. (AEF)

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Students Becoming Life-Long Users: Vision Becoming Reality

by
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Our world is exploding! It's exploding with information. Just look around: instant communication, interactive technology, networking with the world and more print material avail-able than is imaginable. How can the students of today possibly learn all of this information? Obviously, they cannot. But, by becoming life long learners, all of this remarkable information can be available for them to use.

It is essential for all students to become life long information users in order to become quality citizens in today's information world. We, as school librarians, are capable of ensuring this possibility for each student at all grade levels. I consider this our utmost responsibility. Achieving this goal, however, may require the redesign of a school library facility and a change in the library program.

When I began teaching in New York state in 1964, there were some school libraries and in some cases school librarians but the possibilities for use were limited. During the 1970s, students in elementary school were often scheduled into blocks of time for stories or the teaching of isolated library skills. I was very fortunate to work with a school librarian who saw a need for integrating skills into the curriculum. Together, we made plans and implemented them in our school library and in my classroom. We even designed a mini-research paper for sixth graders. Not only was this interesting and fun, but the students remem-bered how to locate and use information the next time it was needed. It was, however, not the accepted practice at that time.

In 1980, as a second year school librarian, I was assigned to a high school of 1500 students. It was working with ninth through twelfth graders that convinced me that integrating curriculum was imperative to learning. I realized that becoming life long learners was a necessity, not a frill. There were incredible amounts of information available in the library and it was easy to access. With instruction based upon need, the students were able to use information to write reports, choose colleges or a career and enjoy the leisure reading. Due to the structure of the high school, skills were integrated and students used the library materials according to assignment. It was a rewarding experience because I was assured that these young people were learning skills that could be used during their entire lives.

In 1988, I accepted a position as an elementary school library media specialist in the Syracuse School District in New York State. Previously, I had worked as a teacher and librarian in a small city, rural area and suburban district, all in New York. The city of Syracuse is located in Central New York, actually right in the middle. The area is known for beautiful lakes such as: The Finger Lakes & Lake Ontario, and the mountainous scenery which is beautiful, especially in the autumn. But our real claim to fame is the snow and the clouds. We are always on national TV and I suspect international TV, for the most snow and cloudiest conditions.

As of November, 1993, the population of Syracuse was 163,860 of which 75% is non-minority and 68% of this population is below the poverty level. The rate of unemployment is 8.8% and the median salary is $28,012. There have been 487 business failures during the last four years, not including 1993 and only one of five major department stores chains is still operating. It is a difficult time for our people.

The Syracuse City School District educates 22,275 students within forty buildings. There are approximately eighteen hundred teachers, one hundred three administrators and seven administrative interns. Most employees have been a part of this system for fifteen years. Presently, there are thirty one school libraries, all with professional librarians and some assistants. The school media specialists have concluded that with so many young people facing a dark future something must be done in order to assure that each will become a life long learner offering the possibility of a successful life.

It was in 1989 that I set my goals for change. My decision was to turn vision into reality. This decision was shared by the other school librarians in the district and together we

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planned a new library program that was adopted by the board of Education in 1993. At this time, I will introduce the plan and then show how it is being implemented.

During 1988 and 1989 the school librarians discussed issues, researched, attended workshops, conferences and meetings all concerned with making changes. In 1990, the district adopted the planning process for a strategic plan to redefine and restructure the district. This plan is based on learner outcomes. Simultaneously, the library media specialists began to plan the new library program which has direct impact on the strategies and action plans.

The Library Steering Curriculum Committee under the auspices of The Professional Responsibilities Committee drafted the final plan. It was a collaborative effort based on the New York State Media Skills Curriculum and the new Compact for learning. In order to fulfill these objectives, students must be able to use information properly throughout their lives. The Syracuse City School District Library Program for K-12 includes a philosophy statement which clearly states the necessary components required if students are to become life long learners. This statement clearly states that unless students are able to cope with a rapidly changing world, their education and skills will become obsolete. Continuous learning throughout their lives is the only way students will adapt to this new world.

In order for our young people to achieve the school district's learner outcomes the steering committee developed enablers. The skills included an increase in levels of development and sophistication as the student grows. Next, the components of a successful library program which are the keys to meeting individual needs of all the library users in a school district were listed .

The school librarians are very proud of this impressive document especially the fact that the Board of Education adopted it in July, 1993. But, how does the school librarian and staff ensure that students become lifelong learners? How does the school librarians and staff turn vision into reality?

First, one must take a good look at the library facility. Is it designed to promote individual and small group learning? Are resources and services accessible? Is the library designed for a flexible program with up to date technology available for use by patrons? Within the constraints of the environment, the facility should be designed to meet the needs of all patrons. This does not require money, but rather planning. Then, goals can be devised for the future, including securing better furniture, more technology and the best materials available. This can be accomplished if the school librarian becomes a part of the school team making the library program an integral part of the whole school program.

Planning the individual school library program and implementing it is difficult, but very possible. If there is a district program in place it is an excellent tool for planning and promoted a program. It should be presented to the faculty, parents and students. Collaboratively, the group can design a workable, flexible program meeting the needs of the specific school, keeping in mind that each program will be unique in accordance with the total school curriculum.

A valuable professional tool that will help in planning is *Information Power: Guidelines for Media Programs*, which was published in 1988 by the American Library Association. The book was prepared by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) for the purpose of providing specific guidelines for designing library facilities, building collections, planning programs and staffing libraries. The Follett Software Company and AASL created a video *Kaleidoscope* based on this book. It shares the vision of schools librarians, that is the school library being the center of learning where students grow and become life long learners. There are two parts to the video, first the overview and the vignettes of how programs are being implemented throughout the United States. I strongly believe that this vision can become reality. It is in the Syracuse City school district. In September of 1993 one or two elementary schools began flexible scheduled library programs. The four high schools have flexible scheduled programs as do most of the middle schools, but once the new program was officially adopted, the Coordinator of Instructional Resources instructed elementary librarians to implement the entire program as soon as possible. At least six elementary schools have adopted the entire library program to be used beginning in September, 1994.

I am the school media specialist at Bellevue Elementary School on the West side of Syracuse where 500 students including pre-K through grade five attend from September

through June. The school was built twenty years ago and is open, which means that there are very few walls. There is one full day kindergarten, one 1/2 day with morning and afternoon classes of approximately twenty five students. Our grades one through three are educated in large instruction areas called houses with fifty students, or in team teaching situations. Our fourth and fifth graders are in selfcontained rooms or in teamed areas. Most of our classes are inclusive, which means children with special needs are learning in regular classroom settings, but there is one exclusive special education room.

The staff at Bellevue is creative, innovative and positive. Our classes often have up to three teachers and three assistants, which means people must be willing to work as a team. Due to the willingness on the part of the staff to try what is needed for children to learn, changing the library facility and program was readily accepted. These educators want students to become quality citizens in our changing world.

First, I decided to make sure that resources and services will always be accessible to all patrons. Using what was available, I rearranged the entire facility. There is now a story area, references area, a large group and small group instruction area. Several activities can be conducted at once, plus individuals can browse, choose materials and sign them out during this same time period. The materials are organized by the Dewey Decimal Classification System and are close to the designated areas.

One way to guarantee access is by providing technology such as circulation and on-line catalog systems. Our district has circulation systems in all schools and on-line catalogs in the high schools. Soon we will all have catalogs and are planning to network within our district in the near future. All schools have CD Roms and writing programs on Apple Computers for students to use. Today's students must use technology proficiently in order to become a successful citizen.

Next, I presented the new library program to the staff. I explained the entire contents of the booklet emphasizing the program. The faculty agreed with the statement on flexible scheduling and we adopted this type of scheduling in September, 1993. Flexible indicates scheduling according to the patron's needs and promotes integration of curriculum, which is accomplished through collaborative planning. This library program supports the Bellevue School Curriculum program.

The library program at Bellevue is scheduled by the teachers and me. Teachers consult a weekly calendar and can sign up by class group or individuals for a week, two weeks or up to a month. Sometimes I meet with a group for three days in a row. Individual or small groups of children are welcome at any time to sign out materials, read or work quietly. The school media center is always open.

Teachers and I plan research projects, booktalks, story time and thematic units together. If a teacher does not come to me about using the library, I go to the teacher. I do not teach any skills that are not integrated into the curriculum because students remember what is taught if it meets a need. I keep a log of the activities and projects planned and I include news about ongoing projects in the school and district newsletters. Teachers really like having their class activities in the news and it provides advertising for the library.

The district's library program booklet includes a possible plan for collaborative planning as a model. At Bellevue, we plan formally by meeting as teams and planning projects. Sometimes, however, we plan informally, thinking about ideas that later become plans. Usually part of a project is completed in the library and part in the classroom.

An outstanding article that explains this type of program appeared in *School Library Journal* in May 1992, and is titled, "Flexible Scheduling: the Dream vs. Reality." This article summarizes the program in Ms. Karen Ohlrich's library in Columbia, Maryland, but it is very similar to the program at Bellevue School. I have prepared a short video showing the library program at Bellevue.

The most difficult part of any library program is evaluation, because achievement of certain skills is not immediate, although worth the wait. As students grow, they use the skills taught within the curriculum independently and they also help other students. Projects completed are a good indicator of learning, plus the processes used can be utilized throughout their lives.

The program must be monitored on an ongoing basis. The Syracuse City School Library Program suggests a variety of assessment tools. I continuously evaluate the facilities and program. I work each day to improve the program in order to provide the best for patrons.

During May and June of 1994, our coordinator and a group of librarians have been meeting with elementary school facilities. We have been presenting the new program and encouraging them to open up the school libraries. I am pleased to report that teachers of the 90s are ready for change. They do have the best interest of children in mind and are willing to take a chance on a new approach. Teachers, librarians, administrators and parents do want young people to become life long learners. In the city of Syracuse vision is becoming reality!